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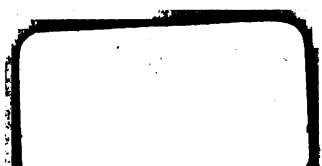
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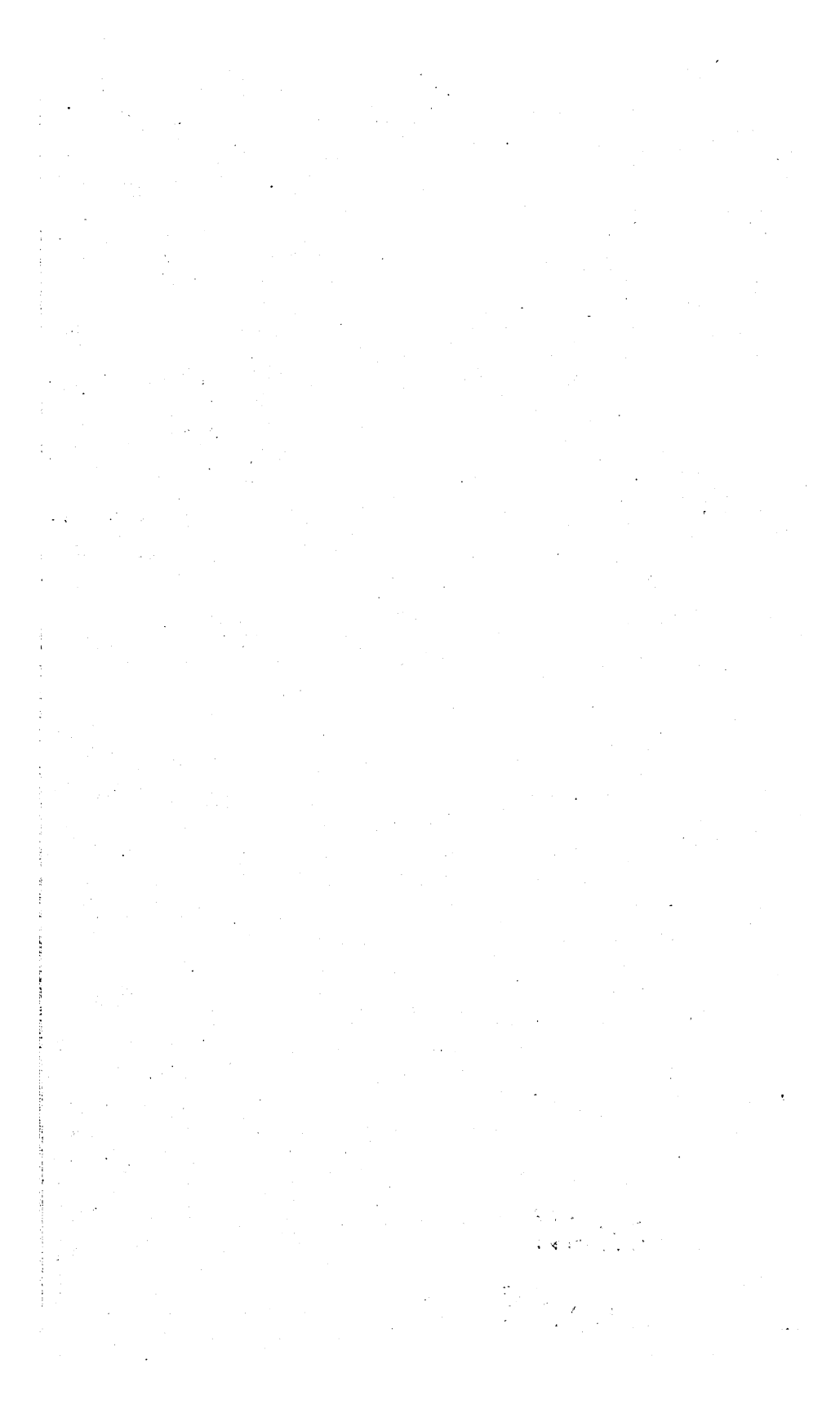
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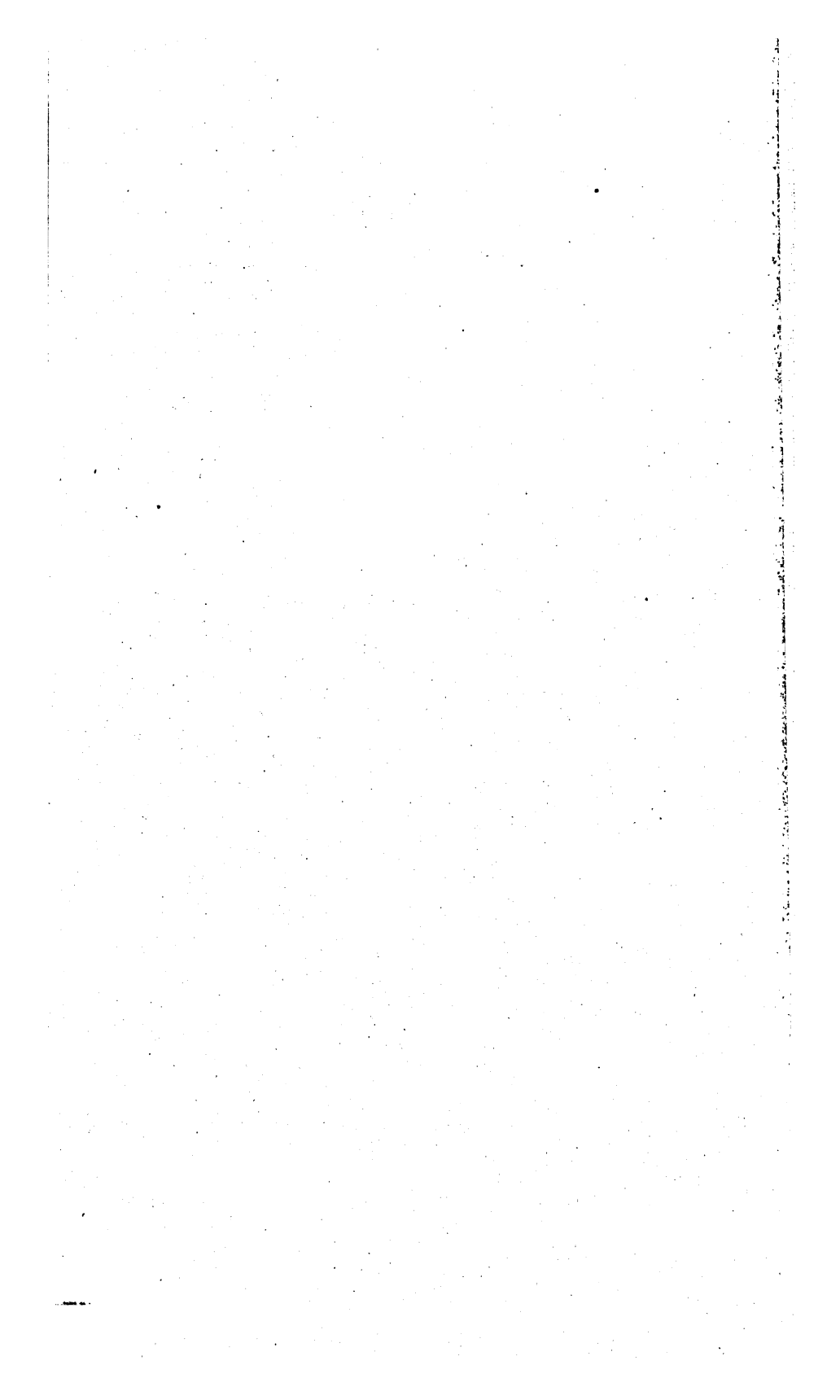
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Samuel Gillman Brown

THE STUDIES OF AN ORATOR:
AN
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DELIVERED AT
THE ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT
IN
DARTMOUTH COLLEGE,

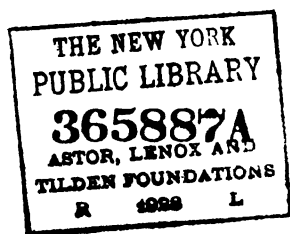
JULY, 1840.

BY SAMUEL GILLMAN BROWN,
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JOY WHEAT
JULY 17
1928

THE

STUDIES OF AN ORATOR.

ELOQUENCE has ever been honored. Men have admired and praised him who, by argument or persuasion, has been able to excite and guide the minds of great masses of people. The orator has stood side by side with the poet. Rhetoric, unfortunately, has held a more precarious position,—a position alternately of undeserved fame, and of unmerited neglect. At one period it embraced, within its dubious limits, all science, all literature, all that was necessary for the complete education of the scholar. At another, it paid, for a too ambitious empire, the heavy penalty of degradation and entire neglect. Some remnants of dishonor have clung to the art, even until the present time. Where criticism begins, eloquence has been thought to end. Rhetoric,—its opponents have said,—is adverse to the highest eloquence, or at least, not exactly congenial with it. It is a lifeless art ; it does not teach us to contemplate beauty in a supple, living body, but, with scalpel and forceps, to examine the mechanism of the dead. In the midst of thrilling music and graceful motion, it tells us that the music and the motion were made by contracting or dilating the glottis, by swelling or expanding a muscle. The name is significant ; and while elo-

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EDITORS.

quence is a synonym for all that can persuade and excite, rhetoric is a synonym for mechanical rules; and the rhetorician is one, who, forgetting the subject, is intent only on the form and drapery of the subject: one who would construct a perfect man, wanting only a heart and vitality.

Perhaps we owe it to the practical disposition of our countrymen, who can devote little time to matters which even border upon speculation, that these ideas have not obtained much notice with us. Let us hope that another reason is, that we have a clearer insight into the nature and objects of rhetoric, and a more correct definition of its boundaries.

Doubtless the mere rhetorician is seldom an orator; still more, the age of rhetoricians has seldom been the age of orators. Rhetoric loses its beauty and fitness, advances beyond its limits, when it aspires to command, not to assist the speaker. Depending upon analysis, it must, of course, succeed the oratory which it analyzes. It clearly has no legitimate authority which it does not derive from the spoken or written word. Not till after orators and poets had moved and persuaded men, did rhetoricians inquire how they did it: and if ever the art pretends to reproduce, by mechanical means, the effects which originally came from vital powers, it becomes empirical and worthless. "The power by which poetry is poetry,"—and must we not also believe that the power by which eloquence is eloquence?—"is beyond the reach of analysis." Life is always incomprehensible. I know that I raise my arm; I know that the blood circulates; but the principle of life eludes my subtlest researches. I can make an automaton that shall raise *his* arm, and pump a crimson fluid through his leathern veins, but he will remain an automaton still. Rhetoric, like every critical art, will rather guide one in the old track than mark out for him a new one; correct his faults, rather than inspire virtues; teach the speaker to avoid bombast or obscurity; polish his rough and ungainly angles, and render him an interesting and attractive speaker: but if he have not the spirit within him, it never can make him eloquent.

Yet, to affirm that the study of the art is incompatible with its exercise, is to deny the existence of an orator since the days of Aristotle and Quintilian, to invade the hitherto inviolate pre-eminence of the Grecian and the Roman, to uncrown and depose the kings and priests of eloquence in every age. If obedience to rules be an evil, the evil might, we hope, be lim-

ited to those upon whom, unfortunately, the mantle of the rhetorician has fallen. Let them, if need be, restrain themselves by technicalities and formulas, cramp their limbs with fetters, and mince their steps according to mathematical admeasurements, while the scholar, leaving the schools, as no longer needful for him, forgetting the rules, but not the spirit of the rules, shall walk forth among living men, and do, with a free heart and a strong hand, such work as he may find to do.

Eloquence, though, like poetry, gushing out from the fountains within, owes more than its sister art to study, to earnest, protracted effort, with which mediocrity may rise to honorable estimation, and without which, even genius may remain unnoticed. Rather, however, than assert the value of an art which, I hope, needs no formal defence, I would suggest, as briefly as may be, some of the studies most important to an orator.

The orator can attain to no very high eminence without a mastery of the resources of language. His speech must be "obedient, dexterous, exact, like a promptly ministering genius." His words must not only be appropriate, but the best. They must "trip like nimble servitors to do his bidding." His style must be pliant. He needs a majesty of diction which shall not dishonor the loftiest thought,—a plain sobriety, suited to vulgar narration,—a playfulness which may gracefully dance about the gayest subject,—a power of indignant rebuke or of elegant jesting. It is not enough that thought be clear and precise. The masters of language do not protrude the idea, meager and bald, but introduce it, vigorous in itself, surrounded by a company of kindred thoughts. Every word has a power to evoke, from the shadows where they have slumbered, a host of images and dim recollections; and, by all this host attended, the main idea moves on. A thousand chords of the human heart are attuned in unison; and if one be struck the others vibrate. Nothing in the use of language more decidedly marks the power of genius, than the ability to bring out the hidden harmony of the instrument. It is not difficult to detect, according to this suggestion, a prominent cause of the different degrees of vividness, which two men shall give to *apparently*, I cannot say *really* the same thought; and while some have a surprising facility in attenuating every idea which they chance to fall upon, others,—and they are the models of the writer,—have as marvellous a power of expanding and enlivening the most ordinary thought. Strip the thought of its graceful robe, and you wonder where

its virtue lay. Truly, it lay not in that bare frame-work which the skeleton-seeker developed, but in the life and motion which he overlooked; not in the plain obvious meaning, but in its rich suggestions. The magnificent prose of Milton is deprived of its glory if it be translated into other words. Milton is gone, and another is come. A faultless prose style is held to be the last attainment in language,—more difficult than a facility in metrical composition, where the jingle of the rhyme assists in a favorable choice of words, and excuses an imperfect phrase. By common consent, the number of great writers may be included in a short catalogue. Genius will not insure a power over words. The thoughts of the writer may be great, but who will be the better, if he cannot give them a ready and forcible utterance?

Were it demanded, it might be shown how those, in every age, whose musical, vigorous speech we most admire, have labored to obtain the desired excellence; with how much toil Milton gained a mastery of the “artifice of language;” with what critical care ‘he built up the lofty rhyme;’ how Petrarch returned to his sonnets, day after day, to alter a single word, or make a trifling change in the arrangement of a line; how Virgil revised, corrected, remodelled his verses, like a “she-bear”—to use his own comparison—licking her ill-formed offspring into shape; how relentlessly Demosthenes disciplined his words, how carefully he chose his figures, how diligently he moulded them. But these things are on record.

Of all the studies which affect the style, common consent seems to place the ancient languages in the first rank. The ancients elaborated their composition with a care to which the moderns are strangers. One cause of this among the Greeks, may be found in that peculiar love of the beautiful, which, as a redeeming virtue, pre-eminently characterized this inquisitive, artful and restless people.

It did more than almost any other virtue to elevate the character of the nation. Like a kind genius, it hovered over every philosopher, poet, orator, historian. It imparted amenity to a character, which, without it, would have been brutalized by war; guided the pen which wrote the *Œdipus Tyrannus*, the *Prometheus Bound*, the *Symposium* and the *Anabasis*; gave birth to temples, such as no other people ever reared; to statues, the fragments of which are the wonder of the world. If, in another country than their own, the traveller lights upon a structure of singular elegance, a statue of faultless symmetry, he is told that

Grecian architects fashioned the pillars, that Grecian sculptors moulded the limbs: and if, as at Pæstum, he discovers the remains of ancient temples, simple, majestic, beautiful,—unknown to history, reverently visited by Augustus as antiquities of unknown date, standing, then as now, grand and solitary in the midst of the deserted campagna,—the antiquarian will tell him that a Grecian colony came, no one knows when, departed, no one knows wherefore, and left, in the rude material of the country, these solemn and imperishable memorials of their existence and their genius.

It is not very surprising that a people, whose remote and unimportant colonies, thus carried with them the tastes of the rugged little territory whence they sprang,—a people, daily receiving the silent influence of the purest exhibition of art, of art consecrated to religion, of art embodied in the fearful and sacred forms of their divinities, and in temples which have long outlasted the superstitions which once they adorned,—a people accustomed, from choice or necessity, to the most generous display of unrivalled ability in eloquence and song, whose knowledge was not stored in books for reference, but living in the memory,—it is not very surprising that such a people should have been quick to notice the faults of the orator and actor; nor, on the other hand, that he, whose first object it was to move or delight the public, should have spared no severity of discipline to obtain *their* favor, in whose praise lay his own immortality.

Latin authors, however different from the Greek in other points, are the same in respect of a careful polish and severe nicety of style. What can surpass the gorgeous panoply with which Cicero invests his thoughts? the playful adroitness of Horace? the terse and comprehensive narration of Sallust? The literature of the ancients bears the same impress as their art. It is the wonder of ancient sculpture, that it seems to have been finished with the chisel, without the aid of rasp or file. It is the wonder of ancient composition, that, to a niceness obtained only by the most assiduous labor, it adds the utmost boldness and freedom. In literature, as in art, there is the same simplicity and unity, the same purity of ornament, springing, like wild flowers, spontaneously from the bosom of the argument; in fine, "perfection in elegance, proportion, grace and dignity." Their perfectness was the result of unrelenting discipline, and suggests to us the means to be used for attaining to

the same excellence. The ancient writings are models of that restrained, simple, severe method of composition, appropriate to men who are conscious of the value of their thoughts, and certain that their worth will one day be recognised. We find in them a fitness of part to part, and of the whole to the object to be attained: a self-denying restraint which never allows the orator to show himself, but only his subject,—which compels him to avoid every thing, however pleasant in itself, if it interferes with the single great end, success. There is an earnestness which will not allow the speaker to play *about* the subject. He is bound to a course where he will gain little credit for style, for action, for grace. His only fame is the fame incident to untiring and successful exertion.

With a view to the same object,—the cultivation of the power of language,—another study suggests itself, most agreeable to the English student. The old English writers have done more than any others to show us the richness of our inheritance in our own tongue. The ambitious painter seeks his inspiration and his pattern, first in nature, then in the works of Raphael, Titian and Guido. The sculptor studies form in the unrivalled antiques, and, for expression, adds the works of Michael Angelo. The architect measures the Parthenon, and St. Peter's and York Minster. So, in painting with words, in shaping and applying the living stones of a language, should the artist come with zeal and affectionate reverence to the schools of the best writers. It is true, indeed, that "to write in the real manner of Jeremy Taylor requires as mighty a mind as his;" but who would not hope, by daily and familiar intercourse, to rise above himself, and approach, in some degree, nearer the serene elevation of that exalted spirit?

We cannot know of what our language is capable, until we see what it has done. Not, indeed, so rich and pliant as the Greek, not quite so majestic as the Latin, not so musical nor so flexible as the Italian, standing midway between the rigid preciseness of the French and the liberty of the German, depending upon the contribution of foreign languages for the increase of its curious store, it yet offers us a combination of excellencies, which it were wiser to use than to disregard, a copiousness which few know how to exhaust; a pliancy which will adapt itself to almost every elevation or depression of the subject; in its Latin derivatives, an elegance and grace which will satisfy the taste of the most refined and sensitive, and in its Saxon

frame-work, a manly dignity and strength, a stern and honest vigor pre-eminently fitted for clear-sighted men,—active rather than meditative, earnest in doing rather than in speculating.

I fear that in the enthusiasm for foreign languages, the dignity and richness of our own are too little prized, and its best writers too little studied. The facility, with which a knowledge of the tongue competent for ordinary purposes may be acquired, prevents that exertion which alone can secure the highest excellence. The older writers, laboring with a healthful spirit, in an age when there was less eagerness in matters of immediate practical utility and more in the development of the spirit, less earnestness in the sciences and more in theology, in questions of church polity and probably of civil government, less possibility of immediate literary popularity, and, consequently, a patient waiting for the revelation of truth, less influence of public anonymous criticism, and a freer display of individual tastes and peculiarities—these writers give us the fresh impress and image of their own minds; and, in so doing, have left models of a variety of style and thought, which it will be difficult to equal, almost impossible to surpass. “It is the existence of an individual idiom in each,” says one who read them and loved them, “that makes the principal writers before the restoration the great patterns or integers of English style.”

There have indeed been writers, in our own age, and in that which is just past, who, for every excellence, fall nothing short of the choicest models. But they, for the most part, careless of the thin, vicious stream of modern ephemeral productions, have drunk from the deep, still fountains of the older writers. I have sometimes thought that he, who attempts to guide another to our earlier authors, may, with slight change, say as Milton did of his own plan of instruction; “I will straight conduct you to a hill-side, where I will point out the right path of a virtuous and noble education, laborious, indeed, at the first ascent, but else so smooth, so green, so full of goodly prospects and melodious sounds on every side, that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming.”

It is questionable whether our language, since the restoration, has not lost more in vigor, than it has gained in smoothness. The writers before the revolution were, indeed, tempted to twist the gnarled stock of our tongue into the manifold forms of the ancients; and the result was not grace, but uncouthness. Yet they produced a variety which we dare not attempt;—a

variety, better, in spite of its occasional harshness, than the tame formality of later times. Give us, if it be necessary, their inversions, their ponderous words, even their obsolete phrases, if in no other way we can get back again their simple dignity, their copiousness, their vigor, their rich, mellow thought. It may be that future writers will seek to unite the sterner virtues of the former age, with the milder ones of our own. Indeed it is so. Some of the first living orators are beginning to use those Saxon *forms*, which, not half a century ago, would have been received with universal condemnation. True, the elder writers are confined to a range of grave subjects—and in oratory, to the productions of the pulpit; but in all of them there are so *many* virtues, such earnestness and sincerity, so much that concerns man as *man*, so much that affects our highest interests,—the wisdom of the Proverbs, the poetry and philosophy of revelation, truths which

‘Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Are yet a master light of all our seeing,

that, the use of language apart, they afford just the instruction and discipline suited to the dignity of an independent and thoughtful man. The orator may not, like the elder Pitt, learn by heart the sermons of Barrows, nor like the younger, read Spenser till he is charged with reading nothing else; but he should not fail of familiar acquaintance with the great and good minds of the seventeenth century.

The orator should carefully study his models. It is not very necessary, indeed, to learn the rules of “Parliamentary Logic,” as laid down by their author, famous for his single speech. It may not be very important to know that he ought to “hesitate, and appear to boggle when he comes to the premeditated and finest part of his speech,”—“to catch at some expression that shall fall short of his idea, and then seem to hit at last upon the true thing,”—“to watch his opportunity, and speak after a person whose speaking has been tiresome;” but it is worthy of his careful regard to detect the habits and character, the studies and pursuits of those who have been most eloquent. We would, if possible, discover the causes of their success from the history of their lives, the circumstances of their speeches, and their manner of conducting the oration. And here, as in art, the choicest models seem voted, by acclamation, to ancient times. Other and more meager languages; other orders of society, the

progress of society, and, most of all, the invention of printing, have diminished the power of the orator by narrowing the sphere of his labor.

For these reasons it may be, that none can ever, in point of authority and honor, dispute the pre-eminence of the ancients. But with the change of times have changed the functions of the speaker. If knowledge be not now, as formerly, propagated mostly by public speaking, if deliberative eloquence have lost something of its importance and sincerity in the strict discipline of parties, the law demands pleaders wiser and more sagacious than ever, and the pulpit has opened a field entirely new. The free institutions of England and America have produced orators whose fame is bound up with that of their country. The deliberative eloquence of the last seventy years has afforded us models in oratory, on the whole, inferior to none the world ever saw.

The times were stormy. Long wars, rapid and dangerous revolutions, questions of intense political, social and moral interest excited the public mind. In one hemisphere, a nation emerged into independence from a long, dubious and exhausting struggle. In the other, the bulwarks of national existence were to be reared, in the hearts of the people, against the gigantic scheme of the greatest of generals, against the more insidious, but not less dangerous attacks of false principles in government and religion.

In England, Lord Chatham was the leader of that splendid band, whose names are everywhere familiar. At present, there remains in that country one very remarkable orator—remarkable for energy, for sarcasm, for argument, for burning thought, for almost every oratorical virtue. The stream of his eloquence gathers strength at every interruption, deviates and hesitates not a moment, or only for a moment, to bury all opposition under the accumulated weight of sarcasm and invective. With few exceptions, these great orators have practically recommended the study of the ancients, and of the old English writers. They have made them their familiar study, have carefully translated them, have committed them to memory. I have mentioned some of Chatham's studies. His celebrated son, three years before his early entrance into public life, is said to have possessed a more thorough, certainly a more ready knowledge of the classics, than most who have devoted to them a life of toil. No living man has more earnestly recommended, by precept and by example, the study of the Greek and Latin orators, indeed, of the orators of every age, than Lord Brougham. The oration for the

Crown is said to be almost at his tongue's end; other orations he has translated; the writers and speakers of modern times he has critically analyzed,—of older times, carefully studied, and reaps his reward in a more thoroughly Saxon, and, which is saying the same thing, a more vigorous style than any orator of his age.

I have suggested some of the minor studies of the orator: for of inferior consequence they certainly are, when compared with those that tend more directly to discipline and invigorate the mind. No beauty of style, no fine arrangement of argument will avail, if the argument itself be feeble.

No man needs a greater variety of knowledge than the public speaker; for no one can use more. Not a branch of literature but will yield him some fruit; not a science in the whole circle but will minister to his wants; not an isolated fact but will find some vacant corner, waiting for its ornament or support. Other things being equal, the power belongs to him whose memory is a storehouse of knowledge. He has an illustration for every new phasis of truth; every principle he embodies in a living form; every decision has its precedent; of passing events, with their manifold relations, he finds the germ or the symbol in other events which have happened elsewhere.

First among those studies which more directly affect the substance of a speech, stands the philosophy of the mind. The orator should know the nature of his species, his own nature. No other study can so fully and harmoniously develop his mind. Nothing is so interesting to man as man. He is not a lifeless, valueless being; his thoughts do not die as soon as uttered; his spirit ceases not its being to-day, or any day when he ceases to appear on earth. Other studies may afford the orator a novel and interesting source of illustration, but argument might have availed without it. They may give him knowledge of the utmost importance in an emergency; but the emergency will occur but once in a lifetime. A knowledge of himself is interwoven with every transaction.

He needs the study for its *discipline*. He needs it to inspire him with self-confidence. No study demands more subtle and patient thought, a greater power of abstraction, or more careful investigation. Nowhere else is such cunning sophistry to be detected, or fallacies to be more carefully watched. As mind is above matter, so is a true knowledge of mental science, a higher step in our intellectual progress, than a knowledge of physical

science. The material world is the object of our daily contact. Every sense brings in from it some intelligible information. But the soul demands a kind of study to which we do not readily submit. Though within us, it eludes our notice. We cannot fasten upon it; we cannot analyze it; we cannot decompose it. Its ethereal essence mocks our instruments. It affords the orator the most appropriate kind of discipline. Every successful artist must be acquainted with the instruments by which he works, and with the material *upon* which he works. If the chemist can have no hope of success without an acquaintance with the alkalis and gases, nor the sculptor without a knowledge of the marble and the chisel, much less has he, who would influence mind, a chance of success, if he be not familiar with the powers of mind. He deals not with matter which can be subjected to experiment, with fixed lines, with acids or earths, but with living men, active like himself, prejudiced, ignorant. He must know the nature and power of those spiritual weapons which will allay turbulent passions, remove prejudice, blunt the edge of ridicule, convince the obstinate, persuade the unwilling.

There are two powers upon which the success of the orator mainly depends; the power of reasoning and the ability to move the passions. He must convince or persuade. His argument must be enlivened by fancy, his fancy restrained by truth. Some speakers, studiously avoiding all warmth of feeling, unfold their subject with a beautiful felicity of demonstration, which will not allow a reply. They force assent. They weave close the tissue of the argument, till the careless opponent finds himself, unawares, bound in meshes which he can neither escape nor despise. It is said of an eloquent casuist of ancient times, that the gates of the eternal city were closed against him, lest, by ill directed argument, he should corrupt the youth. The sophist of our day puzzles the honest man by subtle though worthless reasoning, from the evils of which the heart only, stronger and truer than the head, may save the timid victim; but the heart cannot save him from a disturbed and fearful existence. Let not the orator despise that power, by which he can bind his opponent, by which he can successfully untwist from his own limbs the chains of false argument.

A study of the mind affords an appropriate *kind* of knowledge. We are told that when the great revolutionary orator of Virginia, in one of the unpromising vicissitudes of his early life, became joint owner of a shop, he was not so intent upon selling his small

wares to the needy countrymen who came for a weekly supply, as in prompting and listening to their discussions, or in working upon their feelings by tales of wonder and sorrow. This was the school in which he studied. Here he learned the secret which gave him such unheard of mastery over his audience,—the power to petrify them with fear, to make their cheeks burn with indignation, or to be suffused with tears,—the power of sweeping along with him, in one impetuous torrent, jury and court.

The orator must know himself; for his own heart is the epitome of every heart. He would move the crowd,—he must seek to move himself. He inquires after the character of men, and, for an answer, unrolls the mystic scroll of his own heart, and reads it there. Others are but the reflection of himself, with the shades a little brighter or darker. In his most secret spirit are inclosed the dispositions of the world. Circumstances, occasion, education have wrought some change in the development,—a blessed spirit, it may be, has guided his destiny, has cherished the good, has repressed the bad; but if he examines with patience and sincerity, he will recognise in himself the elements which have variously unfolded themselves in others. Whence but from this comes the value of the *γνωσις σεαυτου*?

He who is master of the *secrets* of his own bosom is master of the secrets of others. He who confidently trusts the suggestions of his own heart, fearlessly rests upon them, careless of timid proprieties—he it is who will make his way directly to the hearts of others. He bears with him the true charm at which all the environments of conventional reserve will fly asunder. Men are in search of reality, however they suffer themselves to be cheated by phantoms; and many a time have they sat unmoved amidst a grand display of what, according to the rules, ought to have been eloquence, and have melted down at a homely but honest story, at an artless appeal, which they knew was not eloquent, or rather which they thought nothing about. Let a man but exhibit the elements and essence of his own character, and he is sure to find in his fellow men an ear to listen, and a heart to sympathize. Even if an opinion be erroneous, it will be respected, if it come from the heart. We prefer rather to fight with a real fiend, than an intangible phantom. The thought that comes honestly from the soul, we feel bound gratefully to receive. We will not trample a true diamond under our feet because it is not of the largest size.

The study of mind enlarges the grasp of the mind. "Acuteness in little things is sometimes attended with incapacity as to great." The faculties are plastic. Habitual intercourse with small things reduces the intellect to corresponding dimensions. Familiarity with great things rarely fails to evolve its powers to the utmost. It is the characteristic of some orators that they do not produce an impression by a single stroke, nor by the exaggerated development of a single mental power; neither by wit alone, nor by rapid and conclusive argument, nor overpowering declamation; but rather by an aggregation of good qualities,—by richness, grandeur and dignity of thought, fertility of illustration, and a just and full exhibition of truth. The works of the greatest orator are remarkable for this virtue. We are disappointed, if we seek for beautiful clauses, which, without much harm to themselves, or much injury to the oration, may be taken as a specimen of his manner, or to adorn an album. A fragment from the cornice of the Parthenon would give a fuller notion of the majesty and symmetry of that matchless temple, than a loose figure or clause from the Philippics, of the power of the distinguished Greek. Each thought in the orations is bound in intimate union with every other thought. The whole evolves itself from the germinal idea, as a tree from its seed. We have not a disconnected catalogue of facts, but a living chain of discussion and argument. It was not the comparing Æschines to "old sprains and fractures, which again become sensible when any new malady has attacked the body,"—not the invectives against "that miscreant," "that abject scrivener," "that vile player,"—not the taunts of "low origin," "menial services," "clamorous howling,"—not the narration of his own public services,—not the oath by the souls who fought at Marathon, at Platæa, at Salamis, at Artemisium,—not that earnest peroration, that solemn prayer, that daring imprecation of vengeance,—no one of these emphatic particulars alone vindicated his own innocence, and banished his rival: but the combined impression of all, acting on minds wrought up to high excitement by still other arguments, other invectives, other prayers.

I can mention but one other favorable influence which the study of mental philosophy will have upon the orator,—its revealing to him the knowledge of *principles*; not of isolated facts, but of the hidden causes of the facts. It will make him familiar with those laws, in accordance with which all truly great actions will be found, by obedience to which alone, all great and useful

reformations must be effected. The day of conflict in the world is not past. The disturbed waters have not yet found their level. Society will undergo changes. Old things will give place to new, the new, perhaps, yield again to the old. The world of mind is even now something like the world of matter during the long birth-day of our earth. Happy he, who, in the tumultuous changes which must come, shall have some fixed star to guide his perilous course. Happy he, who attempts to guide the minds of the people, if his feet be planted on a rock in the clear light of heaven. Oh, if we could but seize the true principle, and reconcile the conflicting elements in society, in morals, in religion! Oh, that one might do in the moral sciences, as Newton did in the natural sciences, when, as was finely said of him, "by the aid of a sublime geometry, as with the rod of an enchanter, he dashed in pieces all the cycles, epicycles and crystal orbs of a visionary antiquity, and established the true Copernican doctrine of astronomy on the solid basis of a most rigid and inflexible demonstration."

A distinction has been taken—is it not a true one?—between the orator and the debater. The debater is familiar with the arts of parliamentary discipline, has learned the signs and artifices of the place, judges as by instinct of the temper of the house, seizes the happy moment for urging the question, is dexterous and successful in attaining his object, but that object may not be a generous nor a wise one. His influence does not extend far beyond the occasion which called it into existence. His virtue is audacity in attack, courage in action, skill in defence, elasticity in defeat. It is not so much the deep forethought and broad plan of a wise general, as the devices of a cool, ready, active, fearless partisan. It is the virtue of Marion compared with the virtue of Washington. I cannot but think that the orator moves in a higher sphere. If he would exert an extensive influence, he must possess that true philosophy which will give unity to his multifarious acquisitions, afford him a central point, about which he may move in his appointed orbit.—In this consisted the immense superiority of Burke over his great rivals and coadjutors. Fox argued as well, debated better; Sheridan poured forth as rapid, if not as copious a flood of illustration and invective; Pitt equalled, perhaps excelled him, in sarcasm and lofty declamation; but in profoundness of thought, in gathering from the amorphous mass of disjointed facts the law in virtue of which great events were produced, in separating the

true and important from the accidental and worthless, in disclosing the principles of political action, and the rules which ought to govern the nation, there is none of his gigantic contemporaries but must do him homage. These, and others like these, are the virtues which make him still the oracle of British statesmen,—of statesmen everywhere. His speeches, sometimes indeed “too refined for his hearers,” sometimes too warm for their excitement, yet oftentimes as effective as any ever delivered, are the great store-house of political truth. It is true that the accused governor-general confessed, perhaps honestly, certainly very adroitly, that “for half an hour he looked at the orator in a reverie of wonder, and during that space actually felt himself the most culpable man on earth.” It is true that the refined and intelligent assembly, not unaccustomed to the display of oratorical ability, was shaken throughout, that men were convulsed with horror and affright, that women sobbed and screamed and fainted. It is also true that men have judged that orator the wisest man of his time,—his genius, prophetic; his political knowledge, boundless. In all matters with which he was conversant, his place, as has been well remarked, is “among the first three.”

There is another study, so congenial in its influence with that just mentioned, that I suggest it here. History has been called the “letter of instructions which the old generations write” and posthumously transmit to the new,—the message which all mankind deliver to every man,—the only *articulate* communication which the Past can have with the Present.” It teaches us the wisdom and folly of our race,—of ourselves; for we are only wiser or less foolish than our fathers, because we are their sons and not their progenitors. In all matters of policy, we know the effect of measures only by experiment. It is given to an age, to a nation, to develop fully the operation of certain principles, in order that the next age, and other nations may be wiser. It was necessary that our fathers should have been driven from the house of bondage, in order that their sons might rejoice in the inheritance of freedom. It was needful that the privy council of Scotland should have enacted, “that, whereas the *boots* were the ordinary way to explicate matters relative to the government, and that there is now a new invention and engine, called the *thumbikins*, which will be very effectual for the purpose and intent aforesaid,—the lords of his majesty’s privy council do therefore ordain, that whenever any person shall be, by their order, put to the torture, the said boots and thumbikins,

both shall be applied to them, as it shall be found fitting and convenient." This was needful in the 17th century, that the privy council in the 19th century should allow examination by the oaths of witnesses alone. It was needful—sad necessity—that a race of doubters should arise, that a whole nation should cut itself loose from religion, in order that men might feel that faith is better than skepticism, that government cannot safely divorce itself from religion, and, it may be, in order that the same people might some time return to a firmer, wiser belief of the truth.

History is the chart of the deliberative orator. It reveals to him the quicksands and rocks where the hopes of empires have been wrecked. It reveals the sources of prosperity, the sources of misfortune. To him who can read it, it offers the suggestions of two hundred generations. It bids us beware of the follies of dead nations. To every individual it offers, somewhere among its records, encouragement to great and good deeds. Would the orator rouse the patriotic self-devotion of his countrymen? History tells him, that among the granite mountains of a small European confederacy, a man was found, who, in a perilous contest, dared to make a path for his comrades, by gathering "a sheaf of Austrian lances" into his own bosom; that, in virtue of this generous self-sacrifice, the name of Arnold of Winkelried has become famous the world over; and that for this, and other deeds like it, Switzerland is a larger country than Russia. Would he speak of the permanency and life of truth? He reads how the sun went down on Egypt and the East, and men slept, while it arose on awakening nations in Italy and England; he reads the oft-told story, how the philosopher recanted with tears, and the world moved still. Would he tell of the direful effects of oppression? He recollects how the pent-up elements lay simmering together for a thousand years, till they burst off the incumbent mass, and overwhelmed nations. Would he show that revolutions are not productive of evil alone? He recollects that sometimes the new order of things has at last proved better than the old; that the volcano is a safeguard against the more destructive earthquake; and that over the lava torrent there spreads out at length a warm and rich soil. Would he tell of liberty unrestrained by moral sentiment, unprotected by law? He reads of a great nation, recoiling from its own frightful image, and rushing for protection, as far as was possible, to the bosom of the power it had just madly hurled to air.

It is from an ignorance of what has been, that men commit so

many mistakes, and that the same error, after a larger or smaller cycle, returns again, like the forgotten fashions of our fathers.

I said that the study of history, in giving the knowledge of right principles, is congenial with the study of mental philosophy. It is chiefly valuable indeed, as a record of the actions of human thoughts and human passions. It would be of no great worth, if it did not cast light into the dimness of the future, as well as irradiate the past. Events which history relates, do but embody the ideas which produced them. Changes in society are not made by chance: men do not move in revolutions, as boys make bonfires, to dance about the smoke and flame. Whenever a great sect has arisen, whenever a great revolution has been produced, it has been at the command of opinions prevailing in the community.* "At the commencement of the French Revolution, in the remotest villages, every tongue was employed in echoing and enforcing the almost geometrical abstractions of the physiocratic politicians and economists. The public roads were crowded with armed enthusiasts, disputing on the inalienable sovereignty of the people, the imprescriptible laws of the pure reason, and the universal constitution, which, as rising out of the nature and rights of man as man, all nations alike were under the obligation of adopting."

Man acts according to his belief. He believes in alchemy; and, with haggard visage and wasted sinews, toils in dark caverns, in the vain hope of transmuting the worthless into the precious metals. He believes in a fountain which gives perpetual youth; and straightway—such is the record of history—embarks for unexplored lands, searches with an energy which commands respect in spite of the folly, and pushes on his rugged pilgrimage with an enterprise worthy of the best cause. He believes in the insufficiency of his own judgment in matters of religion, in the divinely appointed supremacy of the priesthood, and, for centuries, commits his conscience and his faith to his spiritual advisers. He believes that the Bible is the only and sufficient rule of faith and practice, that he may and must examine it, and immediately he produces the reformation.

The subject upon which I have just touched, in its connection with the duty and discipline of a great orator, is, in itself, too ample a theme for this occasion. I leave it, with these hints, and pass to notice the last study which I am allowed to

* Coleridge's Statesman's Manual.

suggest,—the study of *poetry*. I might perhaps more truly say of *art*;—for painting, statuary, architecture and music cultivate those emotions which the orator needs, and are themselves governed by the same principles which govern him. Other studies may be peculiarly appropriate to different professions. The preacher feels his need of mental philosophy; the political speaker, his need of history; but all need the discipline and emotion produced by poetry. Knowledge is vain; of little avail profound investigation, the soundest judgment, the most subtle logic, if there be wanting a power to vivify the cumbrous mass of knowledge, to give a present reality to the past, and to abstractions, a body and a shape.

The materials of the orator are, in many respects, those of the poet,—their objects are different. Both seek the language of strong feeling; both avoid the terms of abstract science; both paint to the bodily eye; both demand the aid of the emotions; both aim at strong impressions. Beyond this, they differ. The poet seeks to please, and instructs only that he may please: the orator seeks to convince, and pleases only that he may convince or persuade. The poet does not give a labored dissertation on the effect of a use of supernatural agencies and deep mystery in poetry and on the power of a sense of guilt, but he tells you a story of the ancient mariner,—the skinny hand,—the glittering eye,—the islands of ice,—the slimy sea,—the dying men,—the living man whose curse it was to live, the only living soul on the wide, wide sea,—the splitting, sinking ship,—the painful pilgrimage. The orator does not speak of unjust legislation, but of the Boston Port Bill. He does not tell you of the powerful foe, the skilful, unfriendly prince; but of Hyder Ali and his army hanging, for a while, like a cloud upon the declivity of the mountains, before it pours down its torrent of devastation and wo into the smiling Carnatic.

If the orator be a philosopher, he must for the time divest himself of the habits which long reflection has induced, and, clad like a little child, be content carefully to lead the blind in the path to wisdom. He must unweave the splendid and intricate tissue of knowledge, and patiently teach the unlearned how to reconstruct the fabric. The technicalities, so dear to him from long acquaintance, or because they express precisely his ideas, must be abandoned. Technical words are good, but not for the orator. Dark, unmeaning and repulsive are they to common ears, as the cabalistic terms of a conjuror. The

metaphysical poet may be a poet to the few "*smitten* with the love of song;" the metaphysical orator may please and instruct the metaphysician; but to the majority, both will speak in an unknown tongue.

Poetry cultivates the imagination. The province of the imagination is not to separate truth from error, but "to render all objects instinct with the inspired breath of human passion." It does not demand if things be true independently, but if they be true in their relation to other things. It does not discover, but enliven. It melts together, into one burning mass, the discordant materials thrown into its crucible. Like the colored light of sunset, it bathes in its own hue whatever it touches. Discarding technical rules, as from its nature averse to them, it adapts means to varying circumstances, and seizing upon the *hearts* of the audience, in aid of belief or in spite of belief, binds them in willing captivity. It annihilates space and time, brings the distant near, draws together the past and the future into the present. It warms the heart of the orator. He then speaks because he feels, not in order that he may feel. The influence flows from within, outward,—not from without, inward.—It tears the orator from considerations of himself, bears him above himself, above rule, criticism, apology, audience, every thing but the subject. The orator stands like an enchanter, in the midst of spirits that are too mighty for him. He alone could evoke them from the dark abyss; but even he is but half their master. He alone can demand the secrets of futurity; but then he can speak only the words that they give him. He inspires others only as he is inspired himself.

Logic is necessary for that severe form of speech, which carries power in its front, and, by its very calmness, and repression of earth-born passions, seems to belong to a higher sphere. It must form the bone and muscle of an extended discourse. Imagination clothes the skeleton with beauty, breathes health into the rigid muscles, lights up the eye, loosens the tongue, excites that rapid and vehement declamation, which makes the speaker to be forgotten, the subject and the subject only to be thought of, betrays no presence of art, because in fact art is swallowed up in the whirlpool of excited feeling. Besides, there are truths with which logic has no concern; "truths which wake to perish never;" truths to be directly apprehended, as well as truths to be proved; feelings as well as facts. Love and passion and fear laugh at demonstration. "Logic," says one, "is good,

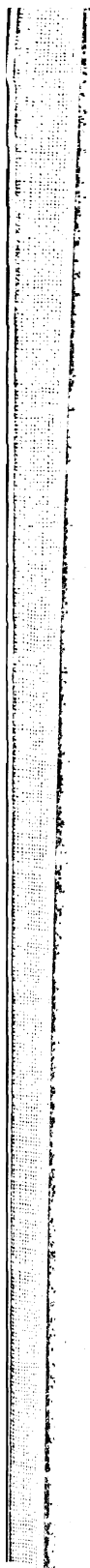
but not the best. The irrefragable Doctor, with his chains of inductions, his corollaries, dilemmas, and other cunning logical diagrams and apparatus, will cast you a beautiful horoscope, and speak you reasonable things; nevertheless, the stolen jewel, which you wanted him to find you, is not forthcoming. Often by some winged word—winged as the thunderbolt is—of a Luther, a Napoleon, a Goethe, shall we see the difficulty split asunder, and its secret laid bare; while the Irrefragable, with all his logical roots, hews at it, and hovers round it, and finds it on all sides too hard for him.”

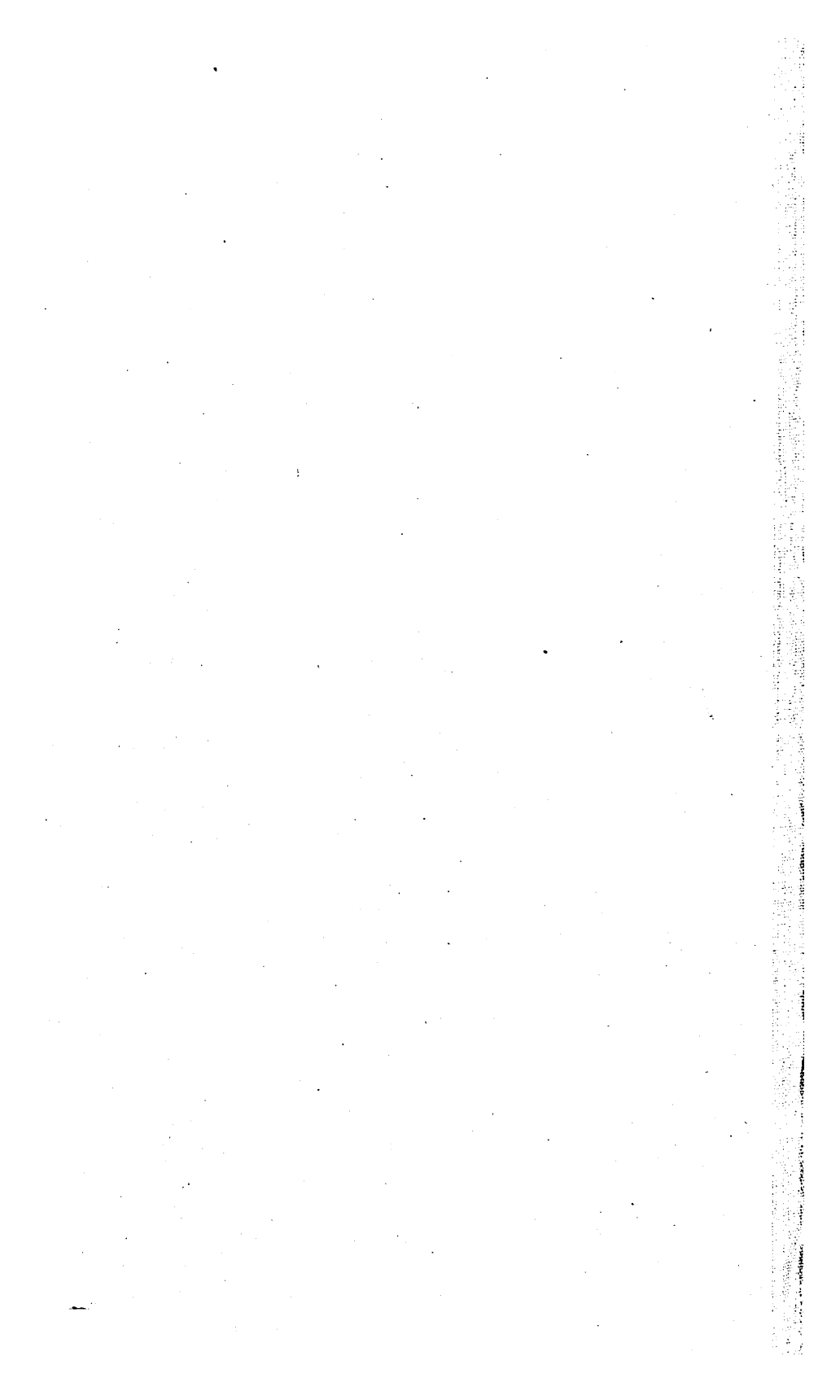
Poetry not only offers us the language of emotion, but produces emotion, and emotion elicits thought. It has been well remarked of the great English dramatist, that he has been true to nature, in placing the “greater number of his profoundest maxims and general truths, both political and moral, not in the mouths of men at ease, but of men under the influence of passion, when the mighty thoughts overmaster and become the tyrants of the mind which has brought them forth.” Then the mind rushes, by intuition, upon the truth; scorns subtle and useless distinctions; disregards entirely the husk, seizes and appropriates the kernel. Emotion in the speaker produces emotion in the hearer. You must feel, you must sympathize with him. Your mind darts, with the speaker’s, right through the textures which cover up the subject, and grasps the heart of it. How deadening are the words of some passionless men. Like a dull mass of inert matter, their lifeless thought stretches across the path of your spirit. Different, indeed, are the words of another, to whom has been given some spark of ethereal fire. His words become to you a law of life. They start your sluggish spirit from its dull equilibrium, and its living wheels shall thenceforth move whithersoever the spirit that is in them moves. Rarely has been found that combination of qualities necessary to the greatest orator,—dignity, enthusiasm, wit, the power of sarcasm, the power of soothing, philosophy which does not despise imagination, imagination which does not spurn the restraints of philosophy.

The great orator must be a great man,—a severe student in broad and deep studies. He must thoroughly know his materials, his models, the history of his race, and most of all, the heart within him. Then shall he have power to struggle in the noblest contest,—that of mind with mind, for the noblest object,—the well being of his race.

With much solicitude, Respected Guardians of the College, I have ventured to accept the appointment with which you have honored me. The labors of the office, though sufficiently arduous, will be alleviated by the sympathy of associates, and, I will believe, by the love of learning in those who shall resort hither for instruction. Its studies, I have just now to enter upon. They open a field large and pleasant enough for the best abilities and taste. It is gratifying to remember, that in other times, they have not been pursued in vain; that there have gone forth from these halls, men, who for eloquence in their several professions, have deserved well of their country. By a beautiful law of our nature, we know that they cannot gain a single new honor, without reflecting some additional lustre upon the institution which nurtured them. May the past be a prophecy for a still better future. In returning so unexpectedly to this place, I cannot but remember how others have toiled in this fair but difficult field. I cannot but remember that sad event which made another appointment in this department necessary. May the mantle of the Fathers rest upon their descendants. May those who shall follow in the same office, be, in every relation and duty, as faithful as he, who, since your last anniversary, so serenely went to his rest,—to his reward.

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